

**Semester at Sea Course Syllabus
Colorado State University, Academic Partner**

Voyage: Fall 2017
Discipline: English
Course Number and Title: E 332 Modern Women Writers
Division: Upper
Faculty Name: Sarah Sloane
Semester Credit Hours: 3

Meeting: A Day 1700-1820, Adlon

Prerequisites: None

One is not born a woman, one becomes one.

—Simone de Beauvoir

Like all the girls back then I knew that being too clever was much worse than being too tall. Being five foot three, tongue-tied and blonde I mostly passed muster, except that I was so unskilled in small talk that I sometimes blurted big words (hypocrisy, or pretentiousness), which jumped out of my mouth like the toads of the fairy tale before I knew it. In any case, you could cultivate the wrong sort of silence - the sort that implied brooding self-absorption rather than attentiveness.

—Lorna Sage

We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are.

—Anais Nin

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contemporary women authors around the world compose in familiar genres and new hybrid forms—from stories and poems to video essays and memoirs posted on Cowbird—to explore contemporary forms of identity, develop questions and theories about place (their locations, both physical and psychological), and experiment with designing different possibilities for a life. Reading some work by internationally renowned or locally important storytellers, poets, and theorists will help us understand their and our own locations, plumbing the past and speculating about the future, asking good questions and arriving at some provisional answers.

This course will explore the social and economic realities and disparities in women's lives from Ghana to Japan, from India to Honolulu. For example, we will read a Ghanaian novel about post-Independence changes to family life; a South African woman composing amongst great linguistic diversity; blogs, documentaries, and online women's writing from everywhere we disembark; a young man's poems about the US military in Ho Chi Minh City during the Vietnam. We will also read selections of postcolonial theory as well as theorist Chandra Mohanty's indictment of white, middle-class, Western, First World feminists whose rhetoric

of inclusivity is seriously flawed. To underscore the point, we will read feminist theory far afield from the Anglo-American norms taught in universities today. In addition to reading, our method of making sense of what we read will include writing reader responses (Rosenblatt), developing a knowledge of what it means to read rhetorically (Burke), and bringing our own bodies, genders, sex, and sexualities (hooks) to the table as we read course texts from around the world. We will also make occasional forays into our own creative writing and keeping meticulous, cross-cultural records of what we see on the ship and onshore.

By tying our readings with the ports we are visiting, we gain a richer understanding of what it means to write as a woman within specific cultures—and as 21st-century citizens of a diverse, rapidly changing world. These women writers find the depths and test the boundaries of their communities and countries, learning what it means to be alive, to be human, to live within global and local structures of gender, race, sexuality, class, technologies, economics, and geographical location.

For students' collaborative project, you will be asked study a particular cultural convention, feature, or larger concepts (identity; memory) when we are onshore, for the whole course. You and your group will be developing a central question in consultation with your professor from the start, recording your first hand observations in a journal for the entire semester. In addition, students will complete three essays, field notes, and do all the reading, as described on the daily syllabus. People of all genders are very welcome in this course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is the sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities . . .

—Adrienne Rich

- To explore how women's writing and experience shift according to region;
- To develop a knowledge of some recurring questions and ideas in contemporary world literature by women;
- To understand location as not solely geographical, but also socio-economic, historical, and socially constructed;
- To understand patterns of violence against women, human rights inequities, and the politics of privilege as they are informed by First, Second, and Third World contexts;
- To understand the conflicts, tensions, and points of agreement among contemporary feminist theorists, especially as they relate to the global circulation of capital;
- To write thoughtfully and analytically in standard academic prose about literature and the contexts within which it is composed;
- To write reader responses of the kind developed by teachers and theorists Louise Rosenblatt and Kenneth Burke;
- To explore ports first hand and write about observations of gendered relationships and human rights.

REQUIRED TEXTS

AUTHOR: Margaret Atwood
 TITLE: The Handmaid's Tale
 PUBLISHER: Anchor Books
 ISBN #: 978-0385490818
 DATE/EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Amma Darko
 TITLE: Not Without Flowers
 PUBLISHER: Sub-Saharan Publishers
 ISBN #: 978-9988647131
 DATE/EDITION: Any

AUTHOR: Arundhati Roy
 TITLE: The God of Small Things
 PUBLISHER: Random House
 ISBN #: 978-0812979657
 DATE/EDITION: 2008 or Any

AUTHOR: Nadine Gordimer
 TITLE: The Pickup: A Novel
 PUBLISHER: Picador Reprint
 ISBN #: 978-1250024046
 DATE/EDITION: 2013 or any

AUTHOR: Roxane Gay
 TITLE: Bad Feminist
 PUBLISHER: Harper Perennial
 ISBN #: 978-0062282712
 DATE/EDITION: Any (2014 in hardback; 2017 paperback forthcoming)

AUTHOR: Riki Wilchins
 TITLE: Queer Theory, Gender Theory
 PUBLISHER: Riverdale Avenue Books
 ISBN #: 978-1626010895
 DATE/EDITION: 2014 or any

AUTHOR: Ocean Vuang*
 TITLE: Night Sky with Exit Wounds
 PUBLISHER: Copper Canyon Press
 ISBN #: 978-1556594953
 DATE/EDITION: 2016

* As a male writer, Ocean Vuang is an unusual choice for a Modern Women Writers' class. However, his poems directly tackle the memories and traces of the US "presence" in then-Saigon in a way both visceral and deeply informed by familial or ancestral memory. *The New*

Yorker references *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* as a “poetry of inclusion,” and it is this sense that the book is radical, revisionist, and necessary to understanding Ho Chi Minh City.

And other short selections from journals, including “The Empire Writes Back” by Bill Ashcroft (an introduction to postcolonial theory), two short stories by Nadine Gordimer, and a selection from Chandra Mohanty.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Bremerhaven, Germany — September 9

A1—September 11: Begin discussing *The Handmaid’s Tale*. What aspects of culture does it point us towards to understand the new contexts of sexism, power, and literacy? How does it help us think about what’s important to learn, observe, and understand when we disembark in Barcelona and elsewhere?

A2—September 13: Discussion of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and how the book represents memory, time, the palimpsest of earlier versions of the USA. Brief discussion of women artists in Barcelona, looking at how individual works of contemporary Spanish women’s art constructs meaning and question.

Barcelona and Valencia, Spain — September 15-18

A3—September 19: Finish discussion of *The Handmaid’s Tale*

A4—September 21: Discussion of the cultural context of Ghana and the lives of rural and urban women there today, as well as histories of HIV, women’s mental illness, abandonment, and other concerns of Amma Darko’s *Not Without Flowers*. How is that culture representing relationships among different genders? Where does power lie and why? How is rural life different from the urban in this country?

No Class — September 23

A5—September 24: Continuing discussion of *Not Without Flowers*. First essay due, an autobiographical statement demonstrating each student’s engagement with their home culture. How does having been in Barcelona and Hamburg affect the way you look at “home”?

A6—September 26: Final discussion of *Not Without Flowers*. Discussion of collaborative projects and how Barcelona and Tema might represent different answers of the same cultural question. Discussion of how to turn field notes into papers.

Tema and Takoradi, Ghana — September 27-30

No Class — October 2

A7—October 3: Debrief about Barcelona and Tema and ongoing collaborative project. Give the historical and cultural contexts to Gordimer's work and begin discussion of Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*. What do we learn about racial relations in South Africa?

A8—October 5: Continue discussion of Nadine Gordimer, with an emphasis on how she portrays information helpful for collaborative projects. How would she answer your cultural question about South Africa?

Cape Town, South Africa — October 7-12

A9—October 13: Final discussion of Gordimer and the histories of race in South Africa. Introduce the notion of postcolonial theory and talk about Bill Ashcroft article (mentioned above in required texts).

A10—October 15: Begin discussion of *Bad Feminist* and selection from Chandra Mohanty. What is a feminist? Is there such a thing as a feminist reading of culture, context, and text? What does it look like? Is your collaborative project a feminist project? Why or why not? What's the theoretical underpinning to the way you are "reading" culture as well as reading texts?

No Class — October 16

A11—October 18: Second essay due, a scholarly essay looking at a particular question or feature across the three novels we have read so far. Continue discussion of *Bad Feminist* and how the lens of postcolonial theory helps us understand the relationships between Africa and the West.

Port Louis, Mauritius — October 19

A12—October 21: What did we see in Mauritius in terms of cultures crossing and mixing and blending? Begin reading and discussing *The God of Small Things*.

No Class — October 22

A13—October 24 Continue discussing *The God of Small Things*.

Cochin, India — October 25-30

No Class — October 31

A14—November 2: Wrap-up discussion on *The God of Small Things* including the perspective of postcolonial theories. Lecture on major women writers of China.

Yangon, Myanmar — November 4-8

A15—November 9: How to read poetry. Constructions of memory and history. How to read a city like a palimpsest, as Atwood taught us at the beginning of the semester. Read the first half of *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*.

No Class — November 11

A16—November 12: Discuss poetic traditions and how they infuse Vietnam. Practice writing in a Vietnamese poetic form. Finish discussing *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*.

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam — November 14-18

A17—November 19: Third essay due: A creative essay (story, series of poems, play, hybrid form) about what a student has learned about the representations of gender so far on the voyage. How does history connect with these representations?

No Class — November 21

A18—November 22: Writing Day, sharing drafts, peer review, meeting of collaborative writing groups, and preparation for expanding on the collaborative projects in China.

Shanghai, China — November 24-29

A19—November 30: Read selection from *Queer Theory/Gender Theory*. What is Japanese queer culture like? If possible, show the documentary “The Great Happiness Space: Rakkyo Café” about young Japanese men serving as escorts and attracting women to this bar run by a 22-year-old.

Kobe, Japan — December 2-6

A20—December 7: Read selection from Chandra Mohanty’s *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” 17-42. “Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” 221-252. Duke University Press, 2003.

A21—December 9: Read selection from Chandra Mohanty’s *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* “Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” 221-252. Duke University Press, 2003.

A22—December 11: Summary lecture on all that we have read. Writing assignment due that synthesizes their journals, observations, and what we have read. Closing discussion of readings.

A23—December 13: What is a cultural theory and how has yours developed? Class collaboration and writing day. Pulling it all together from field notes, observations, memories, experiences, and concepts, guided by the questions raised at the beginning of the semester. Trying out our new theoretical perspectives on a reading of a short story by a Hawaiian author.

A24—December 15: Oral presentations of collaborative field research projects.

Honolulu, Hawaii — December 16

A25—December 18; A Day Final Collaborative Projects due today in lieu of final exam.

San Diego, California — December 23; Collection of final Field Notes reflection: What does it mean to be “Home”?

FIELD WORK

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class.

Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course.

Theoretical Overview

When theorist Michel Foucault asks a central post-structuralist question in his essay “What is an Author?”—What matters who’s speaking? —he is implicitly questioning the importance of naming any personal details of the flesh-and-blood author and/or her/his/their intentions. In this course we are taking a very different approach, one that roundly challenges the central poststructuralist notion of “the death of the author” or that ignores the circumstances of writing. While perhaps still leery of putting too much weight on authorial intention and authorial biography, this class starts from the premise that who does the writing—who gets to speak—and where that writing is done—e.g., in a postcolonial context—is important to understand what is said and how that saying is distributed or disseminated to writers.

Field Class and Assignment

The Field Class for this course will take place on Wednesday, 27 September, in Tema, Ghana.

Class title: Not Without Flowers & the Ghanaian Women’s Experience

What are women’s experiences really like in Ghana today? How do those experiences expand our understanding of global women’s experiences, theories, and our questions about them? Asking good questions is hard work. Having read Amma Darko’s Not Without Flowers, we will have developed a sense of the bleak realities of women’s lives in Accra and other places in Ghana. Is Darko’s fiction accurate; does it relay a picture of Ghanaian

women's lives that is current today? Tentative plans are being developed to include a conversation with the author Amma Darko. By also visiting the International Federation of Women Lawyers—Ghana, Global Mamas, and perhaps the domestic violence task force at the Ghanaian police department, students will not only expand their knowledge of the specifics of women's lives in Ghana, but they will also develop a set of questions that would help them explore and understand women's experiences anywhere.

Field Class Learning Objectives:

1. To contextualize Amma Darko's *Not Without Flowers* through firsthand observations and visits
2. To deepen our understanding of the relationship between cultural contexts and women's experience
3. To develop an understanding of how non-profits, NGOs, and government programs cooperate (or not) in improving local women's material conditions

We will end the day by writing down impressions and reflections from the day, to be reworked as an evolving set of questions to ask in our cultural explorations of women's experiences and how they are written about by women from different cultures.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students.

Independent Field Assignments

Students will keep a journal with guided assignments for each port we visit, consolidating their observations with those made by two other students all semester long. In groups of three, students will define their central cultural questions early in the voyage and then make systematic observations around the world to answer it. Their final collaborative essay can be in the form of a podcast, photo or video essay, documentary, or blog, as well as other options.

METHODS OF EVALUATION/GRADING SCALE

97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%:
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	F
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

All students will be graded according to the scale used at Colorado State University, as described above. In addition, the percentages of the final grade are as follows. Students will be evaluated according to their demonstrated abilities as scholars, thinkers, and writers engaging with primary questions of women's words and lives, rhetorics and realities, around the globe. While all writing, to some extent, is based on autobiography, scholarly research, and is creative, each of the three required essays will emphasize these qualities. More specific instruction will be given with the assignment sheet for each essay and collaborative project.

Essay #1 (Autobiographical)	15%
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Essay #2 (Scholarly)	15%
Essay #3 (Creative)	15%
Collaborative Project	25%
Field Notes	15%
Class Participation	10%
Interview assignment	5%
TOTAL POSSIBLE	100%

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A memo from the student's home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: "I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

RESERVE BOOKS AND FILMS FOR THE LIBRARY

I will be bringing some of my own materials to put on reserve at the library. In addition, if possible I would like to show the documentary “The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief/Rakkyo Café” (2006). Documentary directed by Jake Clennell.

If possible I would also like to have my students view a TEDxEuston talk in December 2012 by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (which later became the basis for her long essay, “We Should All Be Feminists”).